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Review: Beyond the End Times: the Rest of the Greatest Story ever Told

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Beyond the End Times The Rest of the Greatest Story Ever Told By John Noë Bradford Preterist Resources, 1999, 300 pp, \$17.95 paper

One of the intriguing theological trends of the last decade or so has been the role of theological laymen in plotting out and popularizing eschatological positions. That is true whether the particular viewpoint was previously unknown (e.g. R. Van Kampen and the totally new “pre-wrath rapture” view), well-known (J. Jenkins and the serial “novelizing” of the pretribulationist position) or little known (Noë and this splashy, but hit-and-miss, new presentation of a “full preterist” understanding, i.e. that there will be no yet future second coming of Christ, because whatever was to happen took place by AD 70).

In a wide-angle shot of current evangelicalism, this view is a pendulum-swing reaction to polar futurism (particularly pretribulationism). But it also reflects how rapidly the splitting of the ranks of preterism into partial and full shades has developed. Frankly, I was only marginally aware of the distinction until I read R. C. Sproul’s *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Baker, 1998).

Sadly, there is not enough space in a review like this to do more than scratch the surface. Perhaps that is appropriate, though, in the case of a book that, at least in areas where its argument is not strong, barely skims the surface. Whatever points Noë may score in regard to, say, aspects of the Olivet Discourse and understanding the significance of the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in AD 70, he forfeits elsewhere.

We start in the OT with a far less than adequate treatment of the well-known prophecy in Daniel 9. Noë does not deliver on his promise to show conclusively how the six-item agenda in Dan 9:24 has a preterist fulfillment. I kept looking for his presumed “knockout punch,” but, not only did it never land, it was not really thrown! Noë also does not recognize that the 490 years of disobedience in Israel’s past to which the “seventy sevens” in the future are exactly symmetrically parallel (see 2 Chr 36:21) were full of breaks (e.g. when the Jews *did* keep the sabbatical year between entering the promised land, around 1400 BC, and the Babylonian exile, around 600 BC). Finally, Noë engages in shoddy thinking on the starting point of the presumed “decree” of Dan 9:25—the proclamation of Artaxerxes in Ezra 7:11ff—in which nothing is said about rebuilding the temple (this was completed earlier, Ezra 6) or Jerusalem (this was done later, Nehemiah 1–2), two key elements of the vision in Dan 9:24–27.

In the NT, Noë continues to disappoint. For example, he ends up playing the “commissions” of Matthew 10 (to Israel) and Matt 28:19–20 (to the church) against each other, even though he hastens to claim that they are not contradictory. Also, his discussion of the supposed completion of the 490 years prophesied in Daniel 9—according to his calculations, in AD 34 (Acts 8)—comes off like a “left-handed hyperdispensationism” (i.e. almost partitioning Acts into Jewish and Gentile segments). Finally, after several runs through the book, I still cannot find any reference to Acts 1:9–11, the crucial ascension passage in which it is said to the apostles that Jesus “will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go up into heaven” (1:11), referring, of course, to his immediately preceding *physical ascent* in 1:9. Given that Acts 1:9–11 may well be the hardest passage for full preterism, it appears that Noë went with the “silence is golden” strategy (i.e. if you can’t answer it, just ignore it).

The book’s choice to utilize endnotes turns out to be smart, if for no other reason than most people reading popularly styled books do not refer to endnotes very often. In this case, the wisdom of using endnotes is not because they break up the readability of the text of each chapter, though that may well have been the conscious basis of the decision. It is because the book’s text would have been seriously marred by the consistent inconsistency in form and style characterizing the notes. Nor is it

that the body of *Beyond the End Times* is without its noticeable form and style problems either.

Interestingly, that Noë is an active member of ETS is trumpeted proudly (see the back of the book). No doubt, much of his overall theological position is within the evangelical pale. However, I know of no denomination or academic institution, of whatever evangelical stripe, with an eschatology plank of consequence in its doctrinal position that Noë could affirm.

Noe invites his readers to join him in “the Next Reformation” (p. 268), “the Prophecy Reformation” (p. 272). Whether brashness or bravado, this sort of language is eerily reminiscent of two phenomena along the fringe of evangelicalism in the last quarter-century: (1) Robert Schuller’s slick call for a “New Reformation” in the area of self-esteem (which resulted in serious questions about his orthodoxy in regard to sin); and (2) the highly aggressive “megaphone” effect of the theonomic wing of post-millennialism (that led to “distancing” from the late Greg Bahnsen et al.). I suspect that “The Rest of the Story” (to quote Paul Harvey, as Noë has in the book’s subtitle) on full preterism will be that, like these two examples, it will have its moment of fame and then recede into the well-populated archives of passionately reactive, “pick-and-choose” theological positions.

Recommendations: Should you choose to read this erratic book, remember that its author initially made his mark as a motivational speaker. That will prepare you for its readable, but over-hyped, selective assault on what it redefines to be “futurism” (many of those holding traditionally preterist positions, having never been called “futurists” before, will be dumbfounded to find out that is how Noë brands them) and its “sales job” for full preterism. However, if you would prefer a forthright, non-arrogant presentation of full preterism, I have two acquaintances toying with the position—John and Jason Hunter—who I am sure would graciously interact with you as they have with me.

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